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Splendid Recovery



He is called "Miracle Horse", "Steeplechase Marvel" and "Living Legend." Wherever he competes, members of his fan club are there to cheer him on, and turf reporters chronicle his career with a note of awe. Victorian Hill, steeplechasing's all-time leading money winner, defied all odds in the spring of 1992 when he returned to racing after rebounding from complex colic surgery the previous fall. He finished second in the Atlanta Cup and won the Iroquois for a second year. Three years later he is still going strong, participating in the 1995 steeplechase season under the management of his trainer, Janet Elliot.

"Vic was a lucky horse," says Dr. Midge Leitch, his veterinarian. "He got sick during the day in a barn where people paid close attention. He received immediate veterinary care and got to surgery quickly, before a toxic reaction could develop. And he was lucky that he was near a major veterinary center."

"The horse was seriously ill when he was admitted to New Bolton Center in September 1991 after being stricken by colic. We were told that he might not survive the surgery," recalls William Lickle, his owner. "When he came through the procedure alright, it was not known whether he could race again because half his large colon had to be removed to save his life. Only very few horses had survived such a surgery and none had ever competed again."

"The surgery, performed by Dr. David Freeman and Dr. William Hayes, was a

forward looking piece of surgery," explains Dr. Leitch. "The colon was resected and a side-to-side anastomosis was performed. Ten years ago this couldn't have been done. It is really marvelous how treatment horizons have expanded, not just at New Bolton Center but in equine veterinary medicine in general."

It helped that Vic was left with seven feet of large colon and that he was in superb health and condition prior to the colic episode. But the illness took its toll. "He lost 300 pounds of bodyweight in a very short time because he had to be confined to his stall," says Mr. Lickle.

Vic left New Bolton Center's Intensive Care Unit soon after surgery to first recuperate slowly under the care of Dr. Leitch and then at the stable of Janet Elliot. In the months that followed, his feeding regimen had to be changed to accommodate his drastically reduced digestive system. It required frequent feedings of roughage and gradual addition of grain to bring him back to condition. "The colon is vital to water absorption and the conversion of feedstuffs like grain and hay into the proteins that are needed to build, maintain and fuel a horse's body," explains Dr. Leitch. "We had to develop a diet and feeding regimen that would take into account Vic's reduced colon capacity and would provide maximum protein uptake to allow him to regain condition and then maintain it. Once he returned to training and competition, these added demands had to be taken

into account." Vic's diet was developed over a period of time by Dr. Leitch and New Bolton Center clinicians. Intake and output were and are monitored to watch for signs of trouble like impaction. These close watches paid off — twice he developed abdominal discomfort and was treated at once and no complications developed.

Vic's recovery was taken a day at a time. Gradually he was turned out and as his activity level increased, light training was added. Things progressed and the horse resumed training. "We didn't know whether it would work," says Dr. Leitch. "But he lived at a training center where he was closely watched and monitored. I think his recovery is due in great part to the immaculate care and close attention he received."

In his remarkable career, Victorian Hill has won over \$700,000, exceeding his nearest rival by more than a quarter million dollars. And from all indications, Vic will keep adding to his earnings as he is, according to Mr. Lickle, "recovered from the surgery."

Vic's contribution to the record books is not all. "He plays an important role in equine medicine," says Dr. Leitch. "His survival and performance demonstrate that a horse may function well with half a colon, provided it receives a high level of care. He set an example of success and pushed treatment limits a bit further — this in turn may help save the lives of other horses that would be considered 'hopeless cases' if it weren't for Victorian Hill's example."

Director of Development Appointment

David Nelson has been appointed the School of Veterinary Medicine's new Director of Development and Alumni Relations, effective July 1. David was the Director of Development at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, a post he held for nine years. During his tenure at the University Museum, David orchestrated its successful \$23 million capital campaign. Before joining the University, David served in fundraising positions at the Philadelphia Zoo and the American Red Cross.